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Trustees Revise Chapel Requirement

An Editorial

We greet the Trustees' decision to abolish compulsory religious attendance with congratulations and concern. We congratulate them for having at last abolished the archaic principle of compulsory religious attendance, but we are concerned that students may misinterpret this decision as a carte blanche proposal to abolish all religion on the campus.

A system of *required* religious worship at Hamilton or at any place at any time is contrary to the very nature of the religious experience. A person's right to enjoy the freedom to worship cannot and should not be violated. However, to require a student to assume a posture of worship, in church, chapel or synagogue, is both an affront to the intellectual honesty and contrary to the academic and social objectives of the college.

The effect of abolishing compulsory religious attendance on other college campuses where such a system existed has been varied. Following an initial significant drop in chapel attendance at Hobart College after the abolition of required attendance at college chapel services in September 1964, a large number of students still attend service. There has been little negative reaction among the students.

However, at Williams College, where the requirement was dropped in 1962, student attendance at religious services has "decreased appreciably." The apparent lack of a viable substitute program has largely been responsible for the student discontent at Williams.

The future or religious attendance at Hamilton is dubious. We do feel that there will be an appreciable decline in student attendance at chapel, if the College is unable to supply the students with a viable substitute. The challenge that faces the College is creating a program of worship that students and faculty alike will want to attend. There is a need to bring qualified speakers, who represent a wide variety of disciplines and points-of-view to such a service. The need is not for predominantly clerical speakers.

The abolition of the compulsory clause to religious attendance does not vitiate religion at Hamilton. Rather, it gives the student the free opportunity to participate in a religious experience which might be helpful to him.

The entire controversy over the religious requirement has had the effect of provoking considerable thought on an important subject. Many of us have been goaded to take a stand, a stand which has forced us to reconcile our ideas and our actions. At last religion has been placed on personal rather than compulsory grounds.

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EDITOR - IN - CHIEF.....Guild Nichols
EXECUTIVE EDITOR.....Skip Patterson
MANAGING EDITOR.....Joe Willner
ASSOCIATE EDITORS....T. Crane, D. Edelson, J. Meade

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McEwen To Speak This Morning in Chapel

The Board of Trustees voted on Saturday on a recommendation of the Committee on Instruction to discontinue any requirement of student attendance at religious services with the fall term of 1965.

College Pres. Robert W. McEwen will appear in Chapel this morning at 10 a.m. to discuss with the student body the Board's action and its significance.

In taking the action, the Trustees expressed the strong and continuing concern that there be a vital religious program at the College, including the holding of religious services in the College Chapel on Sunday evenings.

The Board also stated its concern that there continue a clear emphasis both in the curricular and extra-curricular program on the development of spiritual qualities in the lives of the undergraduates.

In reaching its decision, the Board was mainly influenced by "a reluctance, as a matter of principle, to associate compulsion with religious worship." While one of the aims of the College will remain that of producing ethically rseponsible individuals, the Board felt that this goal could be more nearly attained without compulsory religious attendance.

The Board concluded that a chapel service with everyone present by compulsion was unsatisfactory. They said that optional attendance would make the service more meaningful for those that do attend.

In effect, the Board's decision will result in a redefinition of religion here on the Hill. The Board emphasized its continuing belief that the College has an obligation to provide some form of religious exposure, including Sunday servces.

McEwen stated that the change wll "provide a real challenge to the College." In order that services might be continued, he stated that Hamilton will have to find ways to insure an adequate student response.

While the future cannot be projected, McEwen foresaw an augmented Faculty Committee on Religious Attendance and Chapel Board to plan the services and insure their relevance in order to attract participation.

The action by the Board culminates a longtime movement among segments of the student body to do away with compulsory chapel. As far back as 1951 students on the Hill demonstrated against the requirement.

The most recent agitation began just over a year ago. The movement was spearheaded by an editorial campaign in the *Spectator*. The controversy touched off a sit-in on the steps of the Chapel by 150 students during a service last March.

Last April, the College liberally redefined its religious requirement when it altered the rules on attendance. Since that time, students have been permitted to fulfill the requirement by attending any religious service or meeting and registering with the College Recorder.

At that time, the faculty passed a resolution recommending that the Board of Trustees make a full review of the matter. Saturday's decision was the result of this review conducted by the Board's Committee on Instruction.

McEwen stated that the Trustee Committee "explored the present practices of 20 colleges, mostly in the East, of our general type. They found that two of them required their students to attend lectures and chapel programs, but that the remainder had no required attendance at religious services."

On the basis of its findings the Committee recommended to the entire Board last Saturday that compulsory attendance be abolished here. All Trustees voting on this proposal approved of the action.

In its recommendation to the Board, the Committee stated that "the temper of our times has changed, with an increased emphasis on individual rights and individual freedom. Whether we think this is good, or bad, we have to face the fact it is with us, and that "Freedom of Religion" also means "Freedom from Religion" if this is what the individual wants."

In the course of its inquiry, the Committee encountered the view that religious participation, forced on an individual against his will, is against the spirit of religious liberty and achieves no beneficial result."

At present, the religious requirements of the College are as follows: "Freshmen, sophomores and juniors are required to attend a religious service or meeting of their own choosing once a week. This requirement may be fulfilled either by attendance at services or meetings conducted on Sunday in the College Chapel or through attendance at any place of worship off the Hill. For seniors with clear attendance records, attendance at religious services is voluntary. To qualify for graduation a senior must have removed all previous delinquencies in religious attendance."

McEwen, in his address this morning, will emphasize that Hamilton's traditional interest in religious instruction will continue in the future. The only difference will be that students will no longer be required to attend on-campus services.

Survey: Religion at Other Colleges

The effects of abolishing compulsory religious attendance on other college campuses have been varied.

In a survey of three colleges, which recently redefined their religious programs, most schools reported an initial drop in attendance after removal of the requirement principle. However, the long-term effects proved varied. A fourth school questioned still requires chapel attendance.

Williams College, which abolished all required chapel attendance in Sept. 1962, "is experiencing a negative reaction to chapel activity," according to Scudder Parker '65, Chapel Board head. Chapel attendance has decreased appreciably, and Parker attributes the decrease to student discontent with what was "an unpopular policy of compulsory chapel attendance."

The Chapel Board of Williams is now "questioning the role and meaning of the chapel" and is seeking ways to make the religious services appeal to more students. The Board is seeking advice from local clergy on ways to improve the chapel service, inviting a wider variety of speakers to the campus and, in general, trying to "create something that will challenge the student body."

So far, however, the Chapel Board's changes in the services have not noticeably increased attendance, and the College is considering doing away entirely with all religious services on the campus.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges, however, which discontinued required religious attendance in September, 1964, have experienced no such negative reaction among the students. Though attendance has decreased slightly, a large number of students still attend the Episcopal services held every Sunday in the Chapel.

Neither the students nor the faculty but the College Chaplain took the initiative in abolishing the requirement at Hobart. The Chaplain felt that the students themselves should decide whether or not to attend the services.

This religiously-affiliated college, containing many preseminary students, and offering the social attraction of a co-educational audience at chapel services, has successfully abolished the religious requirement without decreasing student attendance at services.

Union College, according to Dr. Norman Johnson, head of the Religion Department, has had no attendance requirement at religious services for over 20 years. Although courses on religion are very popular, "very, very few people attend the services held weekly on campus. Those who attend are mostly faculty and people from town."

Colgate University has chapel services each day, Monday through Friday, and students are required to attend two services each week. The services on Tuesday and Thursday are nondenominational religious services, and those on the other days are secular. Upperclassmen are allowed more cuts than freshmen, as was formerly the case at Hamilton. However, the students cannot fulfill the requirement by attending services other than those held in the Colgate Chapel.

According to Mr. Glen Davidson, speaking for the Office of Chaplain, students are very dissatisfied with the present requirement and are now preparing proposals to alter it. According to Davidson, "Religious attendance is required by the Dean of Men and not by the Chaplain."

In short, then, students at colleges similar to Hamilton have been dissatisfied with any sort of required religious attendance. In cases where the requirement has been abolished, attendance at on-campus religious services has decreased.

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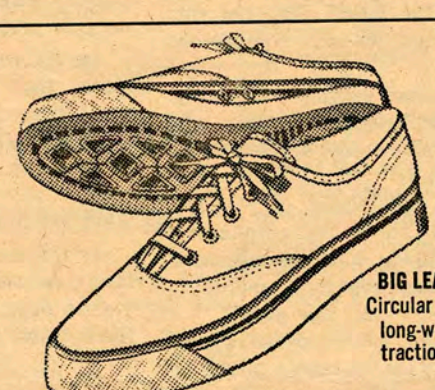

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